

The Wyoming Legislature is willing to become a partner with parents, addicts and others, with individuals and organizations, businesses and the faith community, with schools and courts and local government. The state will provide the incentives and the commitment to create partnerships that work to meet the challenge of preventing and treating substance abuse.

"Wyoming is a small town...with very long streets!" 255

The government, at all levels, has an important and vital role to play in any genuine effort to prevent and treat substance abuse. Through its ability to tax and appropriate, the government can not only raise much of the necessary financial resources, but must also use that power to make certain that programs are held accountable.

We have concluded, though, that the primary role of the state government is to create partnerships. The government cannot solve this problem by itself. Even if the government was willing to try to go it alone, the nature of the substance abuse problem creates natural barriers for an "all government" solution.

Substance abuse is, in one instance, a personal problem with definite spiritual roots. It is a family problem and there

are, and ought to be, definite limits on the ability of the government to intrude into family.

Finally, substance abuse is a community problem. The substance abuse problem, its causes and its solutions differ considerably from one Wyoming community to another. The resources available to meet the challenge differ, as does the political and communal will.



Any truly promising approach must acknowledge all of these factors. The plan must seek to employ the resources of the state to develop effective partnerships. The plan needs to be inclusive, asking all players to the table, giving them an opportunity to use what they bring to help. While we believe the state must exercise considerable leadership, it must also know when to follow.

A new way of thinking

We have an opportunity in Wyoming that honestly does not exist in many states. Our small population gives us a chance to come together as a community to meet the challenges of substance abuse. As we do, we will need to agree that is our common goal. Political, business, professional, religious leaders, and others will have to agree that together we can solve this problem, that it is a common goal, and that it is a common priority. If it is not a common goal, it will not be enough that the Legislature or the Governor makes the commitment.

Wyoming Vision 20/20 has a goal of placing Wyoming among the national leaders in creating a healthy environment for our children, a place where they achieve academically and personally, where families are indeed strengthened, and communities are healthy. If we are to succeed, we will have to think differently, smarter about how we come together.

Success will require decision makers to think about budgets and programs. There is no question that meeting our goals will require people who demand accountability. The commitment to meet this challenge will require a financial investment and the taxpayers need to know that the investment will give them a return.

Smarter thinking about this issue will also require that we think *spiritually* as well. The truth is that the problems Wyoming is confronting related to the abuse of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs are in a fundamental way, spiritual problems. Clearly there are political, economic, and social implications. But at the heart of the experience is a spiritual sense that causes people to make bad choices and communities to fail to come together. If we can talk honestly about the spiritual connection to the problem and its solutions, we will make the right political, economic, and social choices. Those choices will encourage our people to become a part of the solution rather than relying on the government to take care of it.

Ending the stigma

If you ask at any meeting you attend, church services, business meetings, community events of any kind..."how many of you have been impacted by a family member's use of drugs or alcohol?"...nearly all hands will be raised. The statistics are cold revealers of the fact that so many of our families have suffered the experience. But, for the most part, they suffer quietly.

There is a stigma about substance abuse and addiction. Despite the fact thousands of Wyoming families have been ravaged by drugs and alcohol, there are few who are mobilizing for more treatment or prevention programs. If 41% of our kids were diagnosed with an incurable disease, imagine the outcry! The state would be up in arms, demanding something be done. Their families and friends and neighbors would be holding meetings, organizing, writing letters to their legislators and the editors of the local paper. Political leaders would clamor to be a part of developing efforts to meet the need. Professionals would take great pride in being a part of the campaign.

But with 41% of our kids using drugs and alcohol, little has been said.

To be fair, the silence is beginning to be broken. The Governor, the Legislature, a few community groups, and parents have begun to make helpful noises. Their leadership has been critical to creating an environment where reforms are now possible. The Wyoming drug court initiative is one result of their leadership. This plan is another.

If we are to succeed in taking their efforts from vision to reality, we will have to end the stigma. It is a stigma that prevents physicians from raising the issue with patients who present with obvious symptoms of drug abuse. It is a stigma that prevents parents from recognizing clear signs of trouble in their own children. It is the stigma that precludes the best and brightest of our young people from planning careers in addictions programs. It is this stigma that likely explains why of the more than 7000 people seeking treatment in Wyoming last year, only 5 were referred by their pastor. Physician referrals accounted for under 2% of the total, as did employer and school referrals.²⁵⁶

Accordingly, the key to achieving our goals is to be creative about partnering with our citizens. They must understand this is a campaign that is designed to achieve a spiritual connection in Wyoming that will strengthen our kids, our families, and our communities. It is our common goal.

Has 'parenting' become a counter-cultural activity?

To fully understand what it means to "parent" in these times, one should read a book written by theologian Cornel West. The book, The War Against Parents, argues that at the beginning of this new century, parenting has become a challenge unlike at any time in our history. Dr. West contends that regardless of what we teach our children in our homes and churches, the broader, popular culture is working hard to persuade them otherwise. The values

parents try to convey frequently conflict with those our children hear and see on TV, in the movies, their music, on billboards, in popular magazines, and among the celebrities in entertainment and sports.

"Some days it feels as though (parents) are swimming upstream, cutting against the current of all that is valued in our market driven society. In late twentieth-century America, parenting has become a counter-cultural activity." ²⁵⁷

We believe one of the most important partnerships is the one between the government and parents. Too often they view each other as the problem when they are, in a real way, one in the same. While the government needs to be sensitive to charges of interfering with families, there are important ways that government policy can be crafted to help families. For example, if parents are working hard to convince their children not to smoke cigarettes, the message is lost when a local convenience store clerk is willing to sell tobacco to kids. Parent's attempts to discourage underage drinking are significantly undermined by lackadaisical enforcement of laws against selling to minors.

If, for example, the government policymakers are serious about creating an environment where use of alcohol by minors or pregnant women is discouraged, it will have to decide between competing voices. The decision

to make families the top priority will often mitigate against long held views.

The government cannot meet this challenge without the involvement of parents. Given real and often negative cultural forces, neither can parents do it alone. The messages kids hear at home must be reinforced by government policies. Only a consistent message will make a difference.

Involving the private sector

There is little question that one of the pivotal events in changing the way Wyoming looks at this problem was the 1998 statewide conference sponsored by the Wyoming Business Alliance. When this group of community and business leaders acknowledged substance abuse as a problem and demonstrated a willingness to talk openly about it, something important happened in our state.

Employee Assistance Programs

The involvement of the private sector in this partnership is vital. It will happen as business people recognize it is not only a matter of community responsibility but also a matter of "the bottom line." Over the last year, Project Safe, a citizens group in Casper, has spearheaded a program to assess all persons seeking substance abuse treatment in Natrona County. One of the many interesting findings is that 70% of those needing treatment are employed.

Those numbers substantially mirror national surveys.

Congressional findings contained in the Drug-Free Workplace Act include these facts:

- ⇒ 74% of adults who use illegal drugs are employed,
- ⇒ drug and alcohol abuse accounts for a 66% higher rate of absenteeism than that experienced in employees who do not abuse.
- ⇒ health benefit utilization is 300% higher among drug and alcohol abusers,
- ⇒ 47% of workplace accidents are drug/alcohol related, and
- ⇒ disciplinary actions and employee turnover is much higher among substance abusing employees. ²⁵⁸

The Wyoming Department of Employment, unfortunately, does not keep statistics on the numbers of workers compensation or unemployment insurance claims that are affected by drug and/or alcohol abuse, but acknowledges it is significant. They indicate at least one employer has told them he has halted drug testing "because we need the bodies." Many employers have accepted drug and alcohol abuse as a reality of doing business. That can change. Indeed it must change. A partnership with Wyoming employers is a critical part of the solution to Wyoming's substance abuse problem.

Employers are one of the entities with the potential to exert the coercion necessary to force addicted individuals into treatment and to keep them there long enough for the treatment to work. The Partnership For Recovery is a consortium of the nation's top non-profit treatment providers. Its members include the Hazelden Foundation, the Betty Ford Center, and the Valley Hope Association. The Partnership has extensively studied the role of employers in addictions recovery.

They first point out the costs of not treating employees. Firing them and replacing them is expensive. It costs an average of \$7000 to replace a salaried employee. That cost can go much higher, exceeding \$40,000 for a senior executive. A termination often occurs after the troubled employee has caused other, expensive problems for the company.

On the other hand, the Partnership points to numbers gathered by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration demonstrating the value of employee assistance programs:

- ⇒ 85% decline in absenteeism.
- \Rightarrow 50% drop in injuries, and
- \Rightarrow 82% reduction in tardiness.²⁵⁹

"To immediately terminate those who suffer from this disease only compounds the problem for both the employee and the company (as well as the family and the community)." Jerry Spicer, CEO Hazelden Foundation

The United States Small Business Administration reports drug-free workplace programs cost an average of \$22-50 dollars per employee. But, not having a program is not free. Untreated substance abusing employees cost US business an average of more than \$640 per employee each year. 260

In the section of this report entitled "Treatment...for the treatment System", we have included a lengthy discussion on coerced treatment. Dr. Satel, whose work is prominently cited in that section, includes employee assistance programs as effective ways to "coerce" addicts into treatment. ²⁶¹

"Recall the public service announcement, 'Help an addict. Threaten to fire him!' made popular in the late 1980's by the Partnership for a Drug Free America. Employers who follow that directive have established effective employee assistance programs providing treatment for workers." 262

Indeed, employer use of these programs is preferable to allowing an employee to use until she causes a fatal

accident or commits a crime and enters the criminal justice system where a different kind of coercion is available. EAP's are important early interventions. It is important to recognize that they not only benefit the company and the employee. Most of these employees also have families. Intervening early in the employee's life will have an undoubted impact on the children.

It is important to note that simply offering an EAP does not necessarily require the employer to pay the cost of treatment. Indeed, we believe it is important for addicts to invest in their own treatment. However, employers who provide insurance benefits should be sensitive to the need to include substance abuse coverage. Other employers have contributed to the cost. Even then, the payoffs are worth the costs. The Small Business Administration can also be a source of assistance to employers.

We encourage the Legislature to provide other positive incentives for employers to develop and use effective Employee Assistance Programs (EAP's). The statutory framework for accomplishing this goal already exists. W.S. 27-14-201(o) permits the state to discount workers' comp rates for employers who comply with "a safety program approved by the division." Because of solvency problems in the workers comp system, this provision has vet to be implemented. It should be implemented to include rules for utilizing drug and alcohol education and an EAP in any safety program.

Additionally, the Substance Abuse Division should provide technical assistance and training to help employers develop and use effective programs. A necessary adjunct to making this work is the enhancement of the treatment delivery system as recommended herein. Unless that is accomplished, cooperative employers will have no place to send troubled employees. When employers create EAP's, they deserve to know that the community program is an effective partner. These kinds of positive incentives should promote effective use of EAP's

However, the ability of employers to motivate treatment and reduce substance abuse is far too promising to ignore. If such positive incentives are not successful in creating greater usage of EAP's, it is recommended the Legislature next consider negative incentives. Recognizing that substance abusing employees cause more accidents and pose a danger to the public and other employees, those employers who fail to provide adequate programs should not be allowed to challenge workers' comp or unemployment claims on the basis of substance use by the employee.

The Legislature and business community must recognize the great potential for this partnership, potential that extends beyond helping a few employees who are abusing drugs or alcohol. The potential is to help them in a way that promotes public and workplace safety, increases productivity, and makes Wyoming more attractive for

economic development while helping families

Employment Opportunities As Recovery Incentives

Without government involvement, the private sector employer associations and labor organizations should implement partnerships with drug courts, probation and parole, and treatment providers, to open job opportunities for recovering addicts. Remaining clean deserves the rewards that accompany sober lifestyles. Employment in decent paying jobs is one of those rewards. The business community should be called on to supply those jobs.

If employers are willing to create the jobs, the partnership must do what it can to reasonably assure employers they are getting good workers who are remaining sober. Ongoing treatment, to include testing, provides employers with an assurance of clean employees *they do not have with other potential workers*.

We believe it is important that this initiative be entirely a private sector program. It is the business community that will benefit most by developing a program that has the potential to supply them with a continuous stream of good workers. This program can best be accomplished without government rules and red tape and can be the cornerstone of a commitment to recognize that the government can't and shouldn't do it all.

Insurance Benefits

During the course of this study, many treatment providers have urged us to recommend that the state mandate insurance coverage for substance abuse treatment on the same level as other disease treatment is covered. The idea is often called "insurance parity." In another section of this report, we have dealt specifically with the issue. Here, however, we wish to address only a recommendation that in providing health coverage, employers examine the possibility of including meaningful substance abuse coverage.

According to a Wyoming
Department of Employment study, only about two-thirds of Wyoming employers currently even offer health insurance benefits. Fewer than 60% include dependent health care benefits. There is great concern at the Wyoming Business Council that this number will decline in the near future as a result of escalating insurance premiums. We are reluctant to make recommendations that will exacerbate this problem.

Accordingly, we recommend that employers inquire of their insurance provider about the cost of adding substance abuse benefits to their policy. This coverage can be useful in the development of an EAP and, additionally, to encouraging employees to seek help early when they or a family member is in need.

Education and Testing in the Workplace

We are reluctant to support state requirements for drug testing in the workplace. We are persuaded, though, that drug testing in the workplace is helpful. We believe the state should encourage testing for a couple of reasons. One, the real possibility of being tested by one's employer has a dramatic impact on experimental drug use. Employees who believe their employer may test them are far less likely to engage in so-called "recreational" drug use. Second, announcing that drug testing is a part of the workplace environment sends an important community message about the employer's values. Finally, testing is an important way to open the door to effective early interventions through employee assistance programs.

In addition to testing, the workplace is an important context in which to conduct educational efforts. The workplace educational program can be as simple as making brochures available or hanging posters. It can be as elaborate as setting aside time for videos and speakers. It should include making available information that allows an employee to discretely obtain information about where to go for help for himself or a family member. Just having such information available in the workplace sends a powerful message about values.

The Substance Abuse Division should provide technical assistance to

employers willing to establish educational and testing programs.

Employee and Professional Organizations

There are many private sector organizations representing the interests of their members with whom we need to be intentional about partnering. Ranging from the agricultural, industrial, and business groups to labor unions and teachers associations to special interest groups, these organizations represent people. All of their members, regardless of the nature of the organization, have a stake in the success of this effort.

They also have immense credibility with their members. A message from the Substance Abuse Division of the Wyoming Department of Health may not carry the same weight as when the same message is delivered by an organization a person trusts to represent their personal and professional interests. We need to acknowledge their credibility and ask that they use it to help achieve our goals of reducing substance abuse in Wyoming.

Self-directed Recovery Homes

Housing is frequently one of the most pressing needs for newly recovering addicts. As a recovering person makes his or her way through treatment they learn they must leave behind the "people, places, and things" with which they were involved when they used. Recovery is seriously challenged when they find it necessary

to return to the same places where they used or where their old using friends live. And so it is critical, particularly in the early months, that recovering persons have safe, supportive housing.

This need creates a wonderful opportunity for the faith community and the private sector to partner with recovering addicts, treatment providers, drug courts, and probation and parole. Self-directed recovery houses offer a proven method to meet this need. In much of the country a model program called Oxford House works with realtors and landlords to open decent housing to recovering addicts.

"Each house represents a remarkably effective and low-cost method of preventing relapse. This was the purpose of the first Oxford House established in 1975, and this purpose is served, day by day, house after house, in each of the approximately 650 houses in the United States.²⁶⁴

Oxford House is not a treatment program or facility. It is, in its simplest form, a house, shared by recovering addicts. They rent it and share the expenses. No public funds are used although each state has a revolving loan fund to make available low interest loans to help these houses and the tenants. The houses have two ironclad rules. Tenants cannot use drugs or alcohol and if they do they MUST be promptly expelled. Second, each person must pay his or her share of the expenses. They are gender

specific. Beyond that, the tenants in a democratic fashion, establish the house rules.

Tenants may stay as long as they choose. These houses have a very good record of helping addicts remain sober because they offer supportive environments. All of the tenants are "in the same boat", sharing a common struggle. When one is in need, there are others to help.

The use of Oxford House - like other community programs are important not only in providing needed housing, but also in terms of making connections between the recovering addicts and the rest of the community.

Faith-based initiatives

"Government has great responsibilities for public safety and public health, for civil rights and common schools. Yet compassion is the work of a nation, not just a government. And some needs and hurts are so deep they will only respond to a mentor's touch or a pastor's prayer. Church and charity, synagogue and mosque lend our communities their humanity, and they will have an honored place in our plans and in our laws." President George W. Bush, Inaugural Address

Likewise, they should have "an honored place" in Wyoming's plans to make our people, their families and our communities healthier places to live.

As this is being written, there is pending in the US House of Representatives a major faith-based initiative. The effort to involve the faith community in social programs began in 1996 with the welfare reform legislation. President Bush seeks to expand the concept to additional programs and to provide tax incentives for charitable contributions in order to assist in the promotion of the program.

Regardless of the fate of the federal effort, we are persuaded that especially in the substance abuse arena, there is a need to promote a Wyoming faith-based initiative. The initiative should begin by recognizing the on-going contribution of the faith community. Wyoming churches already play an important role by making facilities available for AA, NA, and other 12 step meetings. A Chevenne church has made a house available for a self-directed recovery home. Ministers serve as volunteer chaplains at the prisons and in most of the jails. There are a variety of other ways in which the faith community is already taking the lead. The "faith community is more than the churches. It includes hundreds of Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Families Anonymous, Alanon, and Alateen groups around the state. As a result of their work thousands of Wyoming people are in recovery. We need the contributions of the recovering community to make this plan work.

We believe this plan should build on that involvement and find additional ways in which the churches and other faith-based organizations can serve as a catalyst for community involvement.

Those who know anything about addiction are aware of the irreplaceable role spirituality plays in recovery. Acknowledging one's own inability to solve the problem and turning to a "higher power" is a common element among recovering addicts and alcoholics. Not all turn to a church or religion but most do find the strength to stay sober in a higher power.

Accordingly, it makes sense that the efforts to meet this challenge necessarily involve the faith community. We recommend the state commit itself to a Wyoming faith-based initiative regardless of the outcome of the federal proposal. It should begin with the Governor's appointment of a Coordinator of Faith-based Programs. This person should be a current state employee or official, well enough positioned to make certain that all state agencies and programs working in substance abuse will remain open to the involvement of the faith community.

The coordinator should not only stay abreast of national developments and funding opportunities but should serve as the liaison between the state agencies and the faith community. He or she should make certain the faith community is made aware of opportunities to become a part of the prevention and treatment efforts of the state, local agencies, and providers. Without one person to whom this responsibility falls, it will not likely be done effectively. For too long there has been a false understanding of the "separation of church and state" that has led many in government to understand the faith

community is not welcome in many of these programs. Changing that image and encouraging the involvement of the faith community is too important to be left to chance.

Private sector community leadership

We recommend the Legislature fund community grants, making available the funding and technical assistance necessary to encourage the development of community leadership resources. There are hundreds of Wyoming people with the ability to make a difference. We need to nurture their involvement.

These grants should also be used to encourage the faith community and others to undertake community-based projects such as after school programs and other prevention efforts. Spending dollars strengthening communities will produce results particularly in prevention and early intervention efforts that are critical to breaking the cycle.